

**August 2022**

## **A Note from Your People's Counsel Sandra Mattavous-Frye**

### **All Hands on Deck to Keep Vital Utilities Running**

These continue to be trying times for consumers who have not been able to catch up on utility bill debt accumulated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Now that the pandemic-related moratoriums on service disconnections are a thing of the past, many residents are literally in the dark, and do not know what to do to get the power back on. This is where OPC comes in.



Phone calls have been coming into OPC's office fast and furious with consumers who need assistance. Some have not been able to or do not know how to sign up for a utility payment plan or find money to pay bills. OPC's mission to advocate, educate, and protect is carried out daily as our staff is skilled in helping struggling consumers navigate the processes to get

their electric, gas, or water back on.

OPC acts as a liaison to social service organizations that have funding to get it to consumers as fast as possible. For example, the United Planning Organization (UPO) recently contacted OPC because it was experiencing difficulty connecting with the utilities in a timely manner to get millions of dollars in emergency utility assistance to residents facing disconnections.

To find solutions to this logjam, I hosted a meeting with UPO and key representatives of Pepco and Washington Gas. As a result of the line of communication OPC opened, UPO says more than 400 households received relief to avert disconnections. OPC also is assisting numerous DC Water customers.

OPC's success does not happen without partnerships with agencies like UPO. Moreover, we welcome opportunities to work alongside the utilities to benefit our mutual constituents.

On August 25, OPC participated in "Joint Utility Day," at the Entertainment & Sports Arena in Ward 8. Sponsored by the utilities, the event (captured in photos below) enabled residents to ask questions about their utility service, and learn about payment plans and relief programs all in one place. As some attendees no longer had utility service or were facing shutoffs, fortunately, OPC was there to speak with more than 50 residents, and the next day contacted them and the utility companies to avoid disconnections.

At the Joint Utility Day, OPC staff shared what we pass along whenever we go into the community: *OPC is here to help!* Reach us at (202) 727-3071 or [info@opc-dc.gov](mailto:info@opc-dc.gov).

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## **The Consumer Connection**

### ***Capturing Feedback from the Community***

A Ward 7 resident emailed the following note to OPC about her experience with our customer service:

*I recently contacted the DC Office of the People's Counsel for help with paying my utilities. I was assisted by an intake specialist [in OPC's Water Services Division] and I simply had to let you know how pleased I was with the excellent customer service!*

*From the moment that she contacted me, the specialist was professional, courteous, empathetic, and very helpful. She took time to listen and allowed me to fully explain my unfortunate circumstances.*

*Facing financial problems can be quite challenging, and my search for assistance has not always been the most pleasant experience. OPC's compassion, understanding, and diligence were very much appreciated.*

*I am grateful for the invaluable service that OPC provides to the community.*

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# The Solar Connection

## The Roof! The Roof!

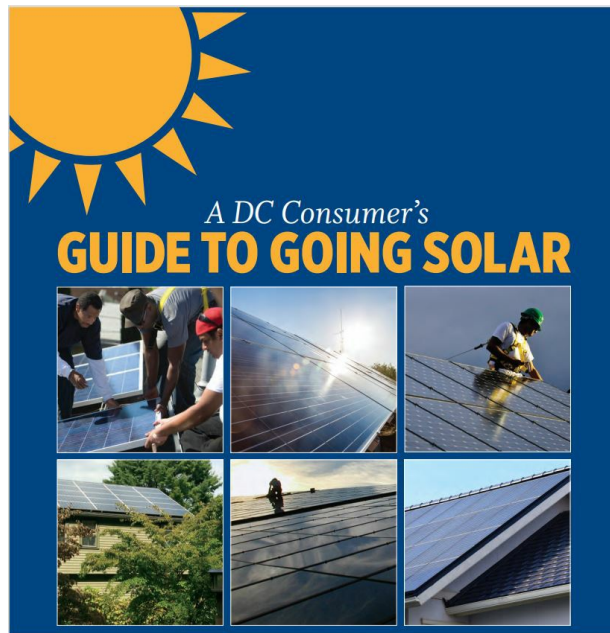
You have taken the important first step and made an environmentally-friendly decision to go solar, did due diligence, crossed your “t’s, and dotted your i’s.”

Having done your homework about the nuts and bolts of going solar, including using OPC’s [Guide](#) to Going Solar as one of your reference points, you finally are ready to begin the process. However, you have a nagging concern about the condition of the roof on your 60+ year-old home because there has been a small leak here and there over the years. Now, you are asking, is it relevant to the process? Yes, the roofing issue is very important information that should be shared with your solar installer from the onset of contract negotiations.

The initial conversation with the installer should include the condition of your roof--does it need to be repaired or replaced, was there work done on it, and if so, when and what was done? Why is this information important? Because if your solar system is placed on a roof that needs to be repaired or replaced, the financial burden of removing the solar panels to make way for repairs after the system is installed, if not covered in your contract, is your financial responsibility. This extra financial burden is avoidable.

The bottom line, know before you go solar, and contact OPC's energy efficiency specialist at (202) 727-3071 for more information.

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## They're at it Again: Beware of “Fake Utility Reps” in Your Neighborhood





As summer winds down, OPC reminds you not to let your guard down! Be cautious with anyone coming to your door or talking to you on the street about your utility services. OPC has received reports of scammers moving through certain neighborhoods pretending to be utility workers collecting debts and trying to scare customers with disconnection if they don't pay their bills through them.

In other cases, the scammers claim you are due money and try to get personal information to credit your account, when they really are trying to get information to rip you off.

Even if a customer has fallen behind on a bill, the utilities do not collect in this way. You will receive notification by mail and other alerts before any action is taken on your account. In addition, when there is extreme heat or cold weather, DC law bars utility disconnections. Never agree to pay a bill using money cards or share your confirmation "pin" number with anyone in person or by telephone. See a full list of tips to protect yourself [here](#).

Always, contact your utility company directly using the numbers printed on your bill or numbers found at [opc-dc.gov](http://opc-dc.gov) when inquiring about your account or seeking to negotiate a payment. You also can call OPC to talk with a consumer complaint specialist at (202) 727-3071 for help with service questions and to learn your rights and options to keep your utilities on.

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## OPC Speaks for Consumers on Transmission Planning



Transmission lines are the highways of our electric grid, connecting power plants and wind farms to the local distribution systems of utilities like Pepco,

which deliver electricity to your home or business. Proactive and thoughtful transmission planning is one of the most important factors in ensuring that the District can meet the energy transition in a just, equitable, efficient, reliable, and resilient fashion. Over the past year the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), which oversees the nation's wholesale transmission system, has been developing new rules for transmission planning and OPC along with the Maryland Office of People's Counsel recently provided comments on this [link](#).

While transmission planning can be very complicated, OPC proposes the following principles to ensure value for District consumers and facilitate the clean energy transition. First, transmission planning should be proactive and consider our needs not just today and tomorrow but 20 years down the road. Second, those needs should include the widespread use of renewable resources, the District's clean energy goals, and ways to make the grid more reliable and resilient to extreme weather conditions. Third, planning should be done at a regional level because regional collaboration would lower transmission development costs for consumers. Fourth, the planning process should allow for meaningful participation from all stakeholders, including underrepresented communities.

Finally, in order to safeguard consumers' money, OPC encouraged FERC to take three important steps: (a) establish independent transmission monitors in each region of the country to ensure that planning is done in a responsible manner; (b) encourage the deployment of grid enhancing technologies which help optimize the existing transmission infrastructure and may eliminate the need for certain costly new projects; and (c) remove barriers to competitive solicitation for transmission projects which can both lower costs and ensure the best solutions are chosen.

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## OPC Connecting at the PSC



### OPC is Advocating for Consumers in the Following Cases:

#### **Formal Case No. 1164: Inquiry Into the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic On District Utilities and Consumers**

On August 5, 2022, OPC filed Comments in Response to Washington Gas Light Company's Motion to Modify the Company's Arrearage Management Program.

**Formal Case No. 1142: Merger Application between AltaGas & Washington Gas**

On August 8, OPC filed Reply Comments to the DC Government Comments on the Joint Proponents' New Term 5 Merger Commitment Proposal.

**Formal Case No. 1163: Investigation into the Regulatory Framework of Microgrids in the District of Columbia**

On August 8, OPC filed Response of OPC & DOEE Application for Reconsideration and Clarification to Order No. 21172.

**RM48-2022-01: In the Matter of 15 DCMR Chapter 48 – Microgrid**

On August 8, OPC filed Initial Comments.

**Formal Case No. 1154: The Application of Washington Gas Light Company for Approval of the PROJECTpipes2 Plan**

On August 15, OPC filled Comments on the Washington Gas Light Advanced Leak Detection Pilot Final Report and Advanced Leak Detection Phase 2 Plan.

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## **OPC In Your Neighborhood!**

OPC looks forward to seeing you in-person. We welcome the opportunity to speak at your Advisory Neighborhood Commission, civic association or community group meeting onsite or virtually. We can give updates on utility issues, trends, and outline how we serve. Call (202) 727-3071 if your group would like our staff to make a presentation onsite or "Zoom in." Contact the organizations listed below if you would like links to attend the meetings we'll be visiting virtually.

Ward 4 CARE Day - Riggs Park  
Thursday, September 1, 2022  
4:00 pm - 7:00 pm  
Riggs LaSalle Playground  
501 Riggs Road NE

ANC 7C  
Thursday, September 8  
7:00 pm - 8:00 pm  
Virtual

ANC 7D  
Tuesday, September 13  
6:30 pm - 7:30 pm  
Virtual

ANC 7E  
Tuesday, September 13



## Photo Gallery



For OPC staff, it was "all hands on deck," to assist consumers at the Joint Utility Day in Ward 8.





Charitable giving is part of OPC's mission. So we are happy to donate backpacks to Vermont Avenue Baptist Church. We thank community advocate, Ms. Barbara Morgan, here with People's Counsel Sandra Mattavous-Frye, Deacon Larry Barringer & Mr. Carlisle Pipkin, for connecting OPC with the Ward 2 church. We wish all students a successful and safe school year!

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Our Denise Blackson is surrounded by Metropolitan Police officers at Lincoln Park in Ward 6 for National Night Out. OPC was onsite at three locations where law enforcement and communities across the District came together to raise awareness about crime prevention and resources such as those provided by OPC.



People's Counsel Sandra Mattavous-Frye greets an attendee at the Mayor's Office on Women's Policy and Initiatives 8th Annual Women's Equality Day Mixer. OPC set up an informational booth and joined other DC agencies in celebrating the 102nd anniversary of the day women were guaranteed the right to vote on August 26, 1920, and the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was certified as law.

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## **Connect With OPC!**

Do you have feedback or an idea for an article that could be featured in an upcoming edition of the OPC Connection? We want to hear from you! Just drop our editorial team an email @ [info@opc-dc.gov](mailto:info@opc-dc.gov) or tweet us [@DCOPC](https://twitter.com/DCOPC).

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## **OPC Connection Editorial Team:**

Doxie McCoy, Phillip Harmon, CharQuia Barringtine, Quaneisha Glover, Thaddeus Johnson, Chris Sellers, Valca Valentine

## **Contributors:**

Sandra Mattavous-Frye, Karen Sistrunk, Laurence Daniels,

Linda Jefferson, Stephen Dudek, Denise Blackson,  
Jean Gross-Bethel, Erik Heinle, Cheryl Morse, Pamela Nelson

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The Office of the People's Counsel, 1133 15th Street NW, Suite 500  
Washington, DC 20005 | Tel: (202) 727-3071 | Fax: (202) 727-1014 |  
TTY-TTD: (202) 727-2876  
[www.opc-dc.gov](http://www.opc-dc.gov) | [info@opc-dc.gov](mailto:info@opc-dc.gov)

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Office of the People's Counsel | 1133 15th Street NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20005

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